

***Ranunculus californicus* Benth.**

California buttercup

Ranunculaceae (Buttercup Family)

Status: State Threatened

Rank: G5S1

General Description: Adapted from Hitchcock et al. (1964): A sparsely to copiously hairy perennial with slender, fibrous, hairy roots. It has several stems that are spreading to lying close to the ground but not nodally rooting, somewhat hollow and cylindrical, rather freely branched, and $7\frac{3}{4}$ to $23\frac{1}{2}$ in. (20 to 60 cm) tall. The basal leaves have petioles up to $4\frac{3}{4}$ in. (12 cm) long and blades that are $\frac{3}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (2 to 4 cm) long and deeply trilobed into cuneate segments, which are more or less biternately lobed or toothed. The cauline leaves are alternate and transitional to the upper linear-lobed bracts. The pedicels are up to 6 in. (15 cm) long. The sepals are hairy, greenish, or reddish-tinged, $\frac{1}{4}$ in. (6 to 8 mm) long, and spreading but the upper half is partially to sharply reflexed. There are commonly 8 to 16 petals (sometimes more) that are oblong or narrowly oblanceolate, $\frac{1}{4}$ to $\frac{1}{2}$ in. (8 to 15 mm) long, and about $\frac{1}{3}$ as broad. The nectary scale is broadly flabellate, about (0.7 mm) long, glabrous, and the lateral margins are free for at least half of their length. The receptacle is ovoid, up to $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (3 mm) long in fruit, and hairless. There are 15 to 40 achenes that are broadly obovate in outline, $\frac{1}{16}$ to $\frac{1}{8}$ in. (2 to 2.5 mm) long, scarcely $\frac{1}{3}$ as thick as broad, smooth, glabrous or rarely somewhat pubescent, with distinct margins that are slightly keeled. The styler beak is flattened, fairly stout at the base, $\frac{1}{64}$ to $\frac{1}{32}$ in. (0.5 to 1 mm) long, and recurved at the tip.

Identification Tips: *Ranunculus californicus* is most closely related to *R. acris*, *R. occidentalis*, and *R. acriformis*. These species can be distinguished by their petals, stems, and achenes. *R. californicus* has 8 to 16 petals, stems that are spreading to decumbent, and the beak of its achene is stout and $\frac{1}{64}$ to $\frac{1}{32}$ in. (.5 to 1 mm) long. *R. acris*, *R. occidentalis*, and *R. acriformis* usually have 5 petals and if there are 8 or more they are usually broader and scarcely twice as long as broad, or the beak of the achene is slender and at least $\frac{1}{32}$ in. (1 mm) long. There are occasionally intermediate hybrids between *R. californicus* and *R. occidentalis*.

Phenology: Identifiable from May to June.

Range: This species is found from southern Vancouver Island to southern California. Historically, *R. californicus* has been found in San

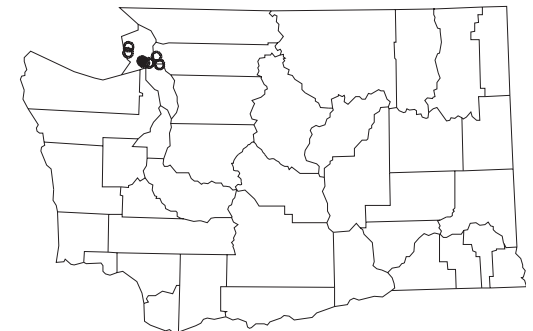
Ranunculus californicus

California buttercup



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Known distribution of
Ranunculus californicus
in Washington



● Current (1980+)
○ Historic (older than 1980)

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Juan and Skagit counties, Washington. There are two recent occurrences from San Juan County, Washington.

Habitat: *Ranunculus californicus* grows on bluffs and in open grasslands along the coast. In Washington, this species grows at an elevation of 15 to 50 ft (4 to 15 m) in open grassy areas, rocky slopes along the shore, and in rocky wooded areas. Associated species include Sitka brome (*Bromus sitchensis*), Nootka rose (*Rosa nutkana*), pink plectritis (*Plectritis congesta*), Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*), Sitka spruce (*Picea sitchensis*), camas (*Camassia* sp.), checker lily (*Fritillaria lanceolata*), buttercup (*Ranunculus* sp.), madrone (*Arbutus menziesii*), kinnikinnick (*Arctostaphylos uva-ursi*), and Rocky Mountain juniper (*Juniperus scopulorum*),

Ecology: This species generally prefers relatively dry grassland areas, but can be found in moister ecosystems. *Ranunculus californicus* grows in association with typical Puget Trough grassland species.

State Status Comments: This species is known from several historical and fewer than five recent sites.

Inventory Needs: Coastal bluffs and grasslands in San Juan and Skagit counties should be systematically surveyed.

Threats and Management Concerns: Definite threats have not been identified for this species. However, the small range of this taxon in Washington and the small number of known occurrences are major concerns. Any disturbance to the immediate habitat, such as grazing, development, and recreational activities, may constitute a threat.

References:

Hitchcock, C.L., A. Cronquist, M. Ownbey, J.W. Thompson. 1964. *Vascular Plants of the Pacific Northwest Part 2: Salicaceae to Saxifragaceae*. University of Washington Press, Seattle, WA. 597 pp.

